



Gratiot judge to raise fees

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A driver's misstep on the road could benefit Gratiot County's bottom line.

Judge James Mackie of the 65th District Court intends to increase a portion of penalties for a handful of offenses as of Oct. 1.

If his theory holds true, at the end of the county's next fiscal year, the extra court costs could amount to as much as \$50,000 for the county. District court is already a major revenue builder for the county's general fund budget.

Court costs, or service fees in the current budget, are predicted to add up to \$1.1 million by late September.

Kathleen Burch, court administrator, expects this amount to rise another \$100,000 next fiscal year, to \$1.2 million, based on the volume of tickets coming in, she said. The number has increased in recent years.

Areas targeted for court cost increases are speeding, drunken driving and marijuana possession convictions.

For instance, a guilty driver found exceeding a posted speed limit by 1 to 5 miles will pay \$115, or \$5 more.

Revenue generated from fees and court costs is passed on to various recipients.

A breakdown of a \$115 ticket is:

\$20 counts as a penal fine, and penal fines create a large portion of the revenue shared by libraries within a county. Distribution is based on a formula set by the state library.

A county general fund receives \$50,

The remaining \$45 is claimed by various state agencies.

For now, tickets issued for higher speeding excesses will not change. Going up another \$100 are court costs for drunken driving convictions. Burch said a typical first offense drunk driving

conviction currently costs \$1,100, made up of penal fines, court costs and state costs. A second offense costs the offender \$1,600.

The judge will increase penalties for convictions of marijuana possession, which he can discretionary set based on an individual's past court history.

Burch wanted to emphasize that a number of tickets written always depend on the availability of police officers to write them. It's next up to the prosecutor's office to bring charges that lands a person before a judge who sets court costs and fines.

"There is a collective group in the whole process," Burch said.

District courts are responsible to collect penalties. The Gratiot County court has carried an above average collection rate of 98 percent, compared to the state average, for three years, Burch said.